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No. 28

“Gentleman Jim”

An Original Dramatic Sketch

BY

W. R. WALKES

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"GENTLEMAN JIM"

An Original Dramatic Sketch

BY

W. R. WALKES

Author of "A Pair of Lunatics," "A Show of Hands," "Her
New Dressmaker," "Villain and Victim,"
"Rain Clouds," Etc., Etc.

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Produced at the Court Theatre, Liverpool, under the management of Mr. George Alexander, on 1st Nov., 1893.

CHARACTERS.

JACK CULVERDON, *a wealthy young man about town*,
Mr. Ben Webster.

MARY SINCLAIR, *a journalist* . . . Miss Granville.

Played subsequently at the Royal Court Theatre, Sloane Square, under the management of Mr. Arthur Chudleigh, by arrangement with Mr. George Alexander, on 8th Dec., 1894.

CHARACTERS.

JACK CULVERDON Mr. Arthur Royston.

MARY SINCLAIR Miss Blanche Wilmot.



“GENTLEMAN JIM.”

SCENE.—MISS SINCLAIR'S flat in *Fleur-de-lis Mansions, Bloomsbury*. Door C. There is a writing-table R. C., and L. C. stands an arm-chair. There is a small table at the back, L. of doorway.

MISS S. (*discovered at table, R. C., reading from a MS.*) “To leap from his luxurious couch was the work of a moment, and seizing his revolver he rushed downstairs; nor did he quail when he found confronting him, with a sneer of derision on his lips, the baleful form of Black Bill the Burglar.” End of Chapter I. Excellent!—winding up with a situation—most essential in a “Shilling Shocker.” Now for a fresh sheet, a deep dip of ink and—Chapter II. Let me see! I must begin with a realistic description of Black Bill. Yes. Now, what would he be like? What a pity it is that I have never met a real flesh and blood burglar. I think I should like to interview a burglar. What a splendid copy he would make! “Black Bill, Esquire, at home at Seven Dials, or Worm Wood Scrubbs.” Yes, but I shouldn't like him to interview me. And that's what generally happens, I fancy. Suppose a man did break into the house, should I have the nerve to attack him with a note book? Poor papa used to say that the journalistic instinct was very strong in me. Would it be strong enough for that, I wonder? Oh, no! I'm sure not. Fancy! A real blood-thirsty burglar with a mask, a dark lantern and all the other horrid things they carry. Ugh! (*shudders. Looking over her shoulder and rising, showing some indications of fear*) I wish I hadn't let Martha go out to-night. It's very lonely here all by one's self, and a ground floor flat is dreadfully exposed. But no, I won't think about it. I'll go on with my story. (*takes up pen and begins to*

write, with an effort) "Chapter II." I must trust to my imagination for the description. "Black Bill was a man of massive build, his eyes had a lurid, fiendish glare." *(starts suddenly and screams)* What's that! Oh, how frightened I feel! *(rises)* I'll never write a sensational story again except in daylight. *(glances at her watch)* Half-past nine, and Martha won't be home till ten o'clock. I daren't go on with it—I shall get more frightened every minute. I know,—I'll read a little, and put this wretched burglar out of my head. Ah! this evening's paper: that will do. The Police Reports, always most interesting! *(in arm-chair, L. C. Reads)* "Capture of a well known burglar. Singular career—um—um—and so on; the prisoner is one of a gang which has for a long time infested Bloomsbury——" Bloomsbury, here! Oh, I'm so glad they have caught him. "He is known by the name of 'Gentleman Jim,' because he usually conducts his nefarious operations in evening dress. His manners are said to be extremely pleasing, and it is reported that he is a gentleman by birth. However, in spite of this, his career has been marked by deeds of fiendish ferocity." Fiendish ferocity! I am *very* glad they've caught him! "He was fully committed for trial." And I hope he'll get penal servitude for life. *(turns leaf of newspaper. Reads)* "Latest News. Remarkable Escape of a Prisoner. On the arrival at the House of Detention of the police van, it was discovered that the solitary occupant, a prisoner committed for trial to-day, had effected an escape by cutting a plank from the flooring of the van, and dropping into the roadway beneath." What a clever man! What's this! "It is understood that the escaped prisoner was none other than the notorious burglar known by the soubriquet of 'Gentleman Jim.'" *(starts up)* Then he is at large again, and this is the neighborhood he infests! Good Heavens! Suppose he should take it into his head to break in here this evening! There is not a soul in the whole of this dreary building but myself. No. 2 is at the seaside. *(with increasing agitation)* No. 3 and No. 4 are empty. No. 5 I know is dining out, because I met him on the stairs in evening clothes; and No. 6 never comes home till two in the morning, and then he is not in a condition to be of use to anyone. Oh, there's the dreadful Horse Dealer man—Mr. Coper, who lives in the half flat opposite—he smells

dreadfully of spirits and stables, still he'd be better than nobody. *(moves to door then stops suddenly)* But, no, how stupid I am! he removed all his possessions in a furniture van this afternoon, and left word with Martha that if anyone inquired for him she should say that he, Mr. Coper, had gone to the African Diamond Fields and would never return. There's no help for me. What shall I do? *(by this time, thoroughly frightened)* I feel that any moment I may hear a crash of glass and see that horrid "Gentleman Jim" enter in evening dress to murder me. I wonder if I could bribe a policeman to come and sit with me till Martha comes back, but of course not, it's against the regulations, unless you're a cook or something of that sort. Let me see, is there any place particularly unsafe? Ha! that window at the top of the stairs, it's always open. I will go and shut it, *(going towards door)* and then come back and pile all the furniture against the door. Oh, how my knees tremble—shall I ever be able to walk there, I wonder? *(pauses at doorway and looks about for a weapon; sees a paper-knife, on table, seizes it and goes out. Slight pause)*

Enter JACK, in evening dress, with hat and overcoat.

JACK. *(pauses at doorway and knocks at open door)* Mr. Coper, Mr. Coper! Anyone at home? Is Mr. Coper in? Apparently not. Well, as there's nobody to do it for me, I'll announce myself. People who live in flats seem very casual about their doors. *(looks at note on paper)* Ground floor. Fleur-de-lis Mansions. Oh, yes, it's all right; this is where that scoundrel Coper lives, so I'll take off my coat, *(does so, and places it on table, up L. C.)* sit down, and wait till some one comes. *(sits R. of table R.)* I tipped the man at the stables to give me his private address—I never could catch him at his yard—then I sent him a note saying that I should call this evening at half-past nine, and politely request him to take back those wretched screws and return me my money; and that if he declined, I should first give him a devilish good thrashing, and then instruct my solicitors to proceed against him, so it's strange he should be out. I don't care twopence about the £500,—thank goodness I can afford it; but I do hate being done, especially over horses. A man looks such an ass. Your friends get to hear of it, and then they chaff you. They think that because a fellow's rich

he's easily taken in ; that's why they call me the "Golden Johnny," confound them. What a fool I was to trust my own judgment. But they were a magnificent pair to look at, high steppers and all the rest of it ; to think that they should turn out broken winded, spavined, and I don't know what. Well, I'll get some satisfaction out of him, pecuniary or otherwise, before I leave this room. (*looks round*) Pleasant quarters the blackguard's got here ; result of profits made out of flats like myself I expect.

MISS S. *appears at door C., and comes down without seeing him.*

MISS S. I could have declared I heard some—(*he rises and turns round. She sees him and exclaims, aside*) Gentleman Jim !! (*stands transfixed by chair*)

JACK. (*aside*) Hullo ! who's this ? The daughter I suppose, sent to intercede ; but I'm too tough for that sort of game—pretty, though—very—seems embarrassed. I don't wonder at it. (*aloud*) How d'ye do ?

MISS S. (*hoarsely*) What do you want here ?

JACK. What do I want here ? Come, that's rather good. (*pointedly*) Oh, you know !

MISS S. (*shudders, and drops half fainting into chair*) Ah !

JACK. (*aside*) By Jove ! She *is* upset. The cowardly ruffian ! to send his daughter instead of facing me himself ; but I'm not going to be put off by it. (*aloud*) I say, you know—look here—

MISS S. (*coming round ; looks round vacantly, then suddenly sees him*) Oh !

JACK. Of course you know perfectly who I am, and why I am here.

MISS S. (*pointedly*) Yes. I know.

JACK. Very well, then, let us discuss the situation calmly and quietly. (*MISS S. covers her face and leans back in chair. Sits at table R. C.*) Now, my dear young lady, I'm very sorry for you, and—all that sort of thing, but I'm not going to leave this house empty-handed.

MISS S. (*shudders again*) Oh !

JACK. So, come, what have you to propose ?

MISS S. (*gets up with an effort, walks to the table timidly, takes off her rings, watch, and other trinkets, places them in a heap on the table and pushes them across to him*) Take them ! Take all, and go !

JACK. (*surprised. Aside*) A dodge to work on my feelings ; but I'm not to be caught with that sort of chaff. (*aloud*) Oh, come, you know this won't do.

MISS S. It's—it's all I've got. (*suddenly*) My buckles ! (*takes off her shoes and adds them to the heap*) These—these—are silver, I assure you, they're very small ones—I mean the buckles, but they're both hall-marked—take them !

JACK. (*aside*) Oh, confound it ! (*aloud. Takes up shoes*) I say, you know, I'm not a dealer in cast-off clothing, so be kind enough to replace these matters upon their proper footing. (*returns shoes, which she places on her feet*)

MISS S. (*suddenly*) Of course, it's money you want ?

JACK. Exactly.

MISS S. Yes, yes, I forgot ; here's my purse ; three pounds, fourteen shillings, and sixpence halfpenny, two stamps and a postal order ; it's all I have in the world ; you'll let me keep this little locket, won't you ? It belonged to my mother. Oh, please do ! (*clasping her hands earnestly*)

JACK. (*crosses L. Aside*) This is simply play-acting. (*aloud*) Now, will you please be sensible. As I said before, I regret extremely that you should be placed in such an unpleasant position, but I must tell you plainly that I am not going to be put off with such ridiculous trifles as these (*pointing contemptuously to heap on table*)

MISS S. Do—do you want more money ?

JACK. Of course I do.

MISS S. (*tearfully*) But, I assure you I haven't another penny.

JACK. (*aside*) Nonsense, they can't have spent £500 in a week, but no matter. (*aloud*) Now, understand me ! Before I leave this house I must either have the £500—

MISS S. (*aghast*) Five hundred pounds !!

JACK. Yes, £500, or I shall be compelled to adopt certain measures of an unpeaceful character, which I will refrain from particularizing.

MISS S. (*horrified*) You—you will commit violence ?

JACK. I regret to say that I shall consider it necessary ; so you see this is my ultimatum. I am in no hurry. Please take your time. I will await your decision. (*sits in armchair L., and takes up newspaper*)

MISS S. (*aside*) The polished ruffian ! What can I do ! If I only had the pluck to keep him engaged till Martha and her husband come home ! It's my only chance of life, for I've nothing more to offer him. I'll be brave and do it. Oh, if I could only be as cool as he is !

JACK. Come, now, which is it to be, money or assault and battery ?

MISS S. (*timidly*) I—I don't quite know this minute—would—would you mind waiting a little while I think it over ?

JACK. Not the least in the world. (*aside*) I should enjoy it ; she's a very charming little lady, or she would be if she were only calmer. (*aloud*) I am always ready for a chat.

MISS S. A chat ? Oh, yes, of course—delightful ! (*aside*) Oh, what a situation !

JACK. Come, won't you sit down ?

MISS S. (*edging round the room to table R.*) Th—thank you. (*sits*)

JACK. By the way, you seem very free and easy with locks and bolts in this part of the world.

MISS S. Indeed ?

JACK. Yes, I got in here without the slightest difficulty.

MISS S. Did you ? Do—do you sometimes find it difficult to—to get into houses ?

JACK. Difficult to get into houses ? I used to once. (*laughs*)

MISS S. Oh !

JACK. The houses of smart people, I mean ; that was when I was a poor devil, without a penny ; but there's no difficulty now. (*slapping his pocket*) I have that which will open every door.

MISS S. (*aside*) Of course, a skeleton key !

JACK. Why, only last week, I enabled my sister to gratify her dearest wish in life, for we made our way into that sacred abode, the house of the Duchess of Dover.

MISS S. What, is your sister also——?

JACK. Fond of going out ?

MISS S. No, of getting in.

JACK. Ha ! ha ! very good ! Same thing, isn't it ? Oh, yes, she's devoted to it much more than I am ; in fact, it begins to bore me.

MISS S. (*quickly*) Then, why don't you give it up and lead a different life ?

JACK. Well, you see, she keeps me up to it, and I am very fond of her; and she's a dear girl in spite of her weakness.

MISS S. Weakness!

JACK. Yes, after all, you know it's mere harmless frivolity. My poor old mother was just as bad.

MISS S. Your mother! (*aside*) What an awful family—all burglars!

JACK. Yes, but even now, when every house in London is open to us, my sister is not happy; she is always haunted by a dread that I—but, dear me, here am I boring you with my private affairs, and you a perfect stranger; but it's just like me to blurt out everything.

MISS S. Pray go on. I like it. (*aside*) The true inwardness of a burglar is horribly fascinating. (*aloud*) What is your sister afraid of?

JACK. What do you think? Of course, it's very absurd, but she's always in mortal dread that I shall one day be "caught," as she calls it.

MISS S. Caught! Ah, yes, there must always be that danger.

JACK. Quite so! My sister says that every day she expects to see my name in *The Morning Post*.

MISS S. (*aside*) Of course, the police reports. (*suddenly*) It was in the *Pall Mall* this evening (*timidly*), but—ah—didn't I see something about you in to-day's paper?

JACK. (*aside*) Those confounded papers again. (*takes stage*) I know, "Among the guests was Mr. 'Golden Johnny' Culverdon." (*aloud*) Oh, very likely, but not in that way. You see, I'm a bit of a lion this season; they've given me a nickname, you know.

MISS S. Yes, I know. (*timidly*) G.—J.—

JACK. G. J.! (*aside*) *Walks to L.* "Golden Johnny!" Confound it! everybody knows it—such a beast of a name, too. (*returns. Aloud*) But, I say, aren't we getting jolly and confidential; do you know I'd almost forgotten what brought me here?

MISS S. (*quickly*) Oh, never mind that, tell me more about yourself. (*aside*) In ten minutes they will be here.

JACK. But, come now, it's your turn. What do you go in for? All girls do something nowadays. (*sees M.S.*) Why, I believe you're a literary lady! May I look? (*takes up M.S.*)

MISS S. (*quickly*) No! no! (*takes it from him.* *Aside*) He mustn't read about "Black Bill;" it would hurt his feelings, poor man!

JACK. And I believe you are writing a story.

MISS S. Yes—it is—a tale—a sensational tale.

JACK. How I should like to see it! It must be so interesting to look at a shocker in the rough; come, now, tell me what it is about?

MISS S. (*aside*) He might be able to coach me up in the details; I always like to consult an expert. (*aloud*) You are sure you won't mind, you won't be angry if there's anything—personal in it?

JACK. Not a bit.

MISS S. You're quite sure?

JACK. Certain; go on.

MISS S. Well, it's about a—burglar.

JACK. No! Really! a burglar! that's a capital idea.

MISS S. (*aside*) He takes it very well. (*aloud*) Yes, a burglar; and not a nice, gentlemanly, well behaved burglar like—yo—I mean some of them—but a bold, reckless, ruthless person, with a fur cap, a red handkerchief and bloodshot eyes.

JACK. Ha, that's the kind of one I like, (*slapping his leg*) the good old-fashioned article; your money or your life, produce-your-spoons-or-I'll-cut-your-throat sort of person.

MISS S. (*aside*) His ideal! His hero!

JACK. Well, and what did he do?

MISS S. He came into a baronet's house in the dead of night with a (*quickly*) centre bit, a jemmy, a dark lantern, a revolver, a crape mask and (*more slowly*) a blood-thirsty determination.

JACK. Plenty of appliances!

MISS S. (*eagerly*) Too many do you think? Please give me your candid opinion. (*takes up pencil*) I'll cut out a few if you think it would make him more realistic. Perhaps the crape mask is too much; are they out of fashion now? You never wear one I suppose?

JACK. (*surprised*) I wear a crape mask?

MISS S. Of course not, I ought to have known better, but what do you say to the jemmy?—do *you* ever carry a jemmy?

JACK. My dear young lady, what are you talking

about? You don't take me for a burglar, do you?
(*laughs*)

MISS S. (*laughing feebly*) Oh, yes, that's very good—you—(*aside*) I can't stand jokes—it is too much.
(*aloud earnestly*) Oh, please don't be funny, or I shall break down—anything but that.

JACK. (*surprised*) Anything but what?

MISS S. Your wit, your pleasantry. I've no doubt it's extremely good, but I feel so dreadfully strung up that if you try to be humorous I shall snap, I know I shall.

JACK. (*aside*) She's candid at all events. (*aloud ; huffed*) Well, then, perhaps I'd better go.

MISS S. (*quickly*) Go! Will you! Oh, you're joking. Will you really go? How good of you! I'll remember that you spared me, and bless you till my dying day.

JACK. (*moodily*) Thank ye! (*aside*) I've not made much impression here. (*aloud*) Then I'll say good-bye.

MISS S. (*aside*) Is he really going? Can it be true?

JACK. (*goes up to table at back, L. C., and begins to put on his overcoat and gloves*) I am afraid the "Golden Johnny" has been "done" once more, but remember Miss Coper—

MISS S. (*aside*) Remember, Miscooper!

JACK. It is only for a time. Tell your father that when next I—— But no matter.

MISS S. (*aside*) My father!—"Golden Johnny"—Remember Miscooper—I suppose that's thieves' slang. How I should like to know what it means—so useful for local color.

JACK. (*at door*) Good-evening!

MISS S. One moment,—would you mind telling me before you go, what is a Miscooper? (*taking out her note-book*)

JACK. What is a Miss Coper?—why you are a Miss Coper, aren't you?

MISS S. Oh, yes, of course, I understand that—but why?

JACK. Why? Well, because you're your father's daughter.

MISS S. My father's——

JACK. Yes, old Coper the Horse Dealer.

MISS S. What! that dreadful old man who lived next door? His daughter? (*proudly*) I whose father was

chief of the Parliamentary Staff of "The Daily Phonograph" and occasional leader writer. (*angrily*) Oh, this is unendurable.

JACK. (*aside*) By Jove! I have put my foot in it!

MISS S. (*suddenly*) Then did you come here to see this Mr. Coper?

JACK. Of course I did. He swindled me over a pair of horses and I wanted to get back my money, £500.

MISS S. (*eagerly*) So that—*that* was the money you said you must have?

JACK. Certainly.

MISS S. (*excitedly*) Then you're not "Gentleman—" I mean a Burglar—I mean a—No matter. Oh, what an idiot I've been. (*aloud ; quickly*) Good-evening, good-evening, sorry you can't stay; thank you so very much—such a charming evening. Good-bye, good-bye. (*shakes his hand violently*)

JACK. But I say, who did you mistake me for? I should like to know—

MISS S. Of course you would, but I'll tell you some other time—to-morrow—the next day—the day after—only go—go. (*forces him up to door*)

JACK. Then I may call again and apologize for my foolish mistake?

MISS S. (*wildly*) Yes, yes; come often and stay as long as you like only go now—I implore you—I beseech you.

JACK. *Au revoir*, then.

MISS S. (*pushes him out of the room, closes door, pushes chair against it, then comes down ; hysterically and wildly*) At last, at last! Saved—saved! and by a Burglar! (*clasps her hands and sinks to the floor in centre of stage*)

CURTAIN.

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